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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7687th meeting
Wednesday, 4 May 2016, 2 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Aboulatta	(Egypt)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 2.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; and Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: The Council has requested the Department of Political Affairs to brief it on the political and security implications of the recent developments in Aleppo. At the outset, I wish to emphasize what the Secretary-General said to the Council yesterday (see S/PV.7685). The pattern of systematic destruction is evident in Aleppo. No corner of the city has been spared. Aleppo is increasingly becoming a shell of what it once was. Government aerial bombardment of the city over the past two weeks represents some of the worst of the war. Opposition shelling of Government-controlled neighbourhoods has also led to death and destruction. There is a clear danger that those attacks and counter-attacks will continue to escalate and even spread beyond Aleppo. We take note of the statement just issued by the United States Department of State that the United States and Russia concluded arrangements late yesterday to extend the nationwide cessation of hostilities to Aleppo, and we urge the parties to abide by that immediately and comprehensively.

The Council will hear shortly from Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien on the humanitarian dimensions of the recent developments in Aleppo. But let me be clear — denying people access to essential humanitarian relief is a serious violation of international humanitarian law. Using starvation as a weapon during conflict is a war crime. No cause can justify the toll in civilian lives that we continue to see around the country every day. All State and non-State parties to conflict are bound by a strict obligation to comply with the rules of international humanitarian law. I remind Council members of the Secretary-General's call for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court. Those responsible for war crimes must be held to account.

Unfortunately, ever more shocking reports have been received from the city of Aleppo over the past two weeks. We have all seen the horrifying images of attacks on hospitals in both Government- and opposition-held neighbourhoods of the city. Let me once again be absolutely clear: intentional and direct attacks on hospitals are war crimes. Indiscriminate attacks on civilian neighbourhoods in Aleppo have also continued. Both Government and opposition forces have reportedly made attempts to achieve territorial advances in recent weeks. Finally, reports of joint military operations being conducted both by groups that are parties to the cessation of hostilities and by those outside it, such as the Al-Nusra Front, present a major challenge to stabilizing the situation.

The overall situation in Aleppo increasingly resembles some of the worst days of the period before the cessation of hostilities. As I mentioned, we understand that the United States and Russia concluded arrangements for a day of silence in Aleppo and its surroundings, starting last night at one minute after midnight Damascus time, but its implementation has proved challenging, even as it has led to an overall decrease in violence. Consolidating and extending that agreement would be an important step in the right direction. We also hope that the arrangements of days of silence announced earlier for parts of Damascus and rural Latakia will also be consolidated, and we welcome the news that the silence has been extended to the eastern Ghouta suburb of Damascus for the next 48 hours.

We must put the cessation of hostilities back on track throughout the country, and all should do their fair share in that regard. Moving forward, additional measures will also be needed to reinvigorate and ensure enhanced monitoring of the cessation of hostilities. In that regard, Special Envoy de Mistura held consultations over the past two days with the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group ceasefire task force and is in Berlin today to meet with German and French officials. He also met separately with the

head of the opposition's high negotiations committee. I welcome the co-Chairs' decision to deploy additional staff to Geneva to increase oversight of the cessation of hostilities.

Turning now to the political process, Special Envoy De Mistura was clear in his briefing to the Security Council on 27 April: in order to be credible, the next round of negotiations should be supported by tangible progress on the ground in terms of a consolidated cessation of hostilities and increased humanitarian access. The Special Envoy intends to reconvene intra-Syrian negotiations later in May, but doing so without progress in those two areas runs a real risk of becoming a failed political process. In particular, the current levels of violence in Aleppo are having a negative effect on the Syrian parties' ability to engage in negotiations.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly said that there is no military solution to this conflict. The basic fact remains that the only way for peace to come to Syria is through a political solution based on a credible political transition that emerges from intra-Syrian negotiations. With that in mind, during the round of negotiations held from 13 to 27 April, Special Envoy De Mistura developed a mediator's summary that identified 18 points that are necessary if political transition arrangements are to move forward.

During that last round of negotiations, progress was made in the sense that all participants, including the Syrian Government, accepted that a Syrian-led transition is necessary in order to end the conflict. In future rounds, we will have to determine how the respective visions of a political transition that have been put forward conform to the requirements of resolution 2254 (2015) for credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance; of the resolution's endorsement of the Vienna statements in pursuit of full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex); and of its reiteration that a sustainable solution to the current crisis in Syria must include, among other things, the establishment of an inclusive transitional governing body with full executive powers, which shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent while ensuring the continuity of governmental institutions.

In resolution 2254 (2015), the Vienna statements and the Geneva communiqué, the international community has already defined a number of core principles for any transition. Chief among them for ensuring a credible transition is the requirement set out in the Geneva communiqué for all Government institutions, including the security and intelligence services, to perform in accordance with human rights and professional standards and to operate under a leadership that inspires public confidence, under the control of the transitional governing body. We are at a point where the renewed backing of the International Syria Support Group is required to take forward the intra-Syrian negotiations on a political transition process, based on full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué.

As per resolution 2253 (2015) and numerous other Council resolutions, combating terrorism is a top priority. The need to tackle that issue, however, should not prevent us from advancing serious negotiations on a political transition. Now that terrorism is being addressed on a separate, credible and parallel international track, it should not hinder progress on the political transition process. Let us also be clear that there can be no place for terrorism, in Syria or anywhere else. Through the political process, one of the greatest contributions we can make to fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front and their ideology is by achieving a comprehensive political transition to an inclusive, democratic and participatory State.

In accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy are trying to arrive at an agreed way forward by August. We cannot waste the opportunity provided by the negotiations in Geneva. It would be a mistake to allow the parties to the conflict to play for time or territory on the ground so as to strengthen their positions at the negotiating table. The United Nations will strive to resume the negotiations as soon as feasible, in the hope that, in the meantime, the efforts to put the cessation of hostilities back on track, including in Aleppo, will bear fruit.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing. I echo his call and that of so many others for an end to the carnage in Aleppo, and in Syria generally. For the sake of the people of Aleppo, Syria and beyond, we cannot squander the opportunity provided by the negotiations in Geneva. I am glad to note the news that have just been

received, as announced by Mr. Feltman, of a further agreement and hope that it can be implemented in full.

But I am horrified by the continued death and destruction in Aleppo. Over the past 10 days, indiscriminate attacks and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas by Government forces, non-State armed groups and listed terrorist groups has intensified, mostly affecting innocent civilians. While the dead are still being counted and while medical personnel are trying to save lives and tend to the injured, we can already estimate that hundreds of civilians have been killed or injured, including dozens of women and children.

Life for people in Aleppo is horrendous and has lost all sense. Access to basic and essential services such as water and electricity is sporadic at best. People are living under daily threat and terror. Those who remain in eastern Aleppo, roughly 300,000 people, live in constant fear of the next attack from the air, including from barrel bombs. School activities for thousands of children have been suspended, and Friday prayers have been cancelled. The estimated 1.3 million people living in western Aleppo city are crowding into basements, seeking refuge from volleys of shells and mortar rounds, which continue to slam into what is left of their homes, as people and humanitarian workers are pinned down in their respective factional quarters in the city. There can be no explanation or excuse, no reason or rationale for waging war on civilians.

I am going to focus again on the inexcusable, deeply disturbing attacks on medical facilities. We have all seen the harrowing images of bombs and mortars raining down on medical facilities and medical personnel across Aleppo in recent days. On 22 April, an air strike hit an ambulance en route to assist people wounded in an earlier air strike in the Al-Huluk neighbourhood of eastern Aleppo, killing the driver and the paramedic. On 27 April, Al-Quds hospital, the most advanced paediatric care centre in Aleppo — let me repeat, a hospital dedicated to treating children — was destroyed after being hit by a wave of air strikes, which by all accounts had been launched by the Government of Syria. Fifty people were killed, including several doctors, and eighty more people were injured. On 29 April, air strikes destroyed a United Nations-funded primary health centre in the Marjeh Square neighbourhood and the Boustan Al-Qasir health-care centre in eastern Aleppo, which are both currently controlled by non-State armed groups, injuring several people and putting the facilities out of service. In western Aleppo, currently controlled by the Government, Ibn Rushd hospital was hit by mortars, allegedly fired by non-State armed groups last week, and just yesterday an attack on the Al-Dabeet maternity hospital, in western Aleppo, again allegedly by non-State armed groups, resulted in three fatalities, injuring fifteen more. Those terrible attacks have not only claimed innocent lives, but have also had a multiplier effect, leaving tens of thousands of civilians unable to obtain even the most basic levels of care, even as fighting intensifies around them.

More broadly, according to Physicians for Human Rights, there have been over 360 documented attacks on some 250 medical facilities during the course of the conflict. More than 730 medical personnel have been killed. Hospitals dedicated to treating children and those serving pregnant women are no longer places where civilians can safely go for treatment. And it is now considered a risk, as I said in my previous statement to the Council (see S/PV.7682), to live near a medical facility.

Clearly enshrined in international humanitarian law and as the Council reconfirmed yesterday (see S/PV.7685), the protection and provision of medical assistance and health care to the wounded and sick is at the heart of humanitarian action. Whoever they are and whatever side of the fight they are on, those responsible for such repeated, unconscionable acts of inhumanity must understand that their acts cannot and will not be forgotten. Such attacks against civilians are violations of international humanitarian law. Some of them amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those who are responsible must know that they will one day be held accountable,

I want to pay tribute to the tireless efforts of humanitarian actors and first-responders, most of whom are Syrian, who continue to risk their lives to stay and deliver assistance in Aleppo and across the country. So far this year, the United Nations and partners have delivered life-saving aid to hundreds of thousands of people per month in Aleppo city, originating both from within Syria and from across the border in Turkey.

However, we remain extremely concerned about how the security situation in Aleppo city is impeding humanitarian access and operations. Already, in the past few days, many humanitarian actors have had to suspend their operations, unable to reach tens of

thousands of children, who could not be vaccinated last week. We are dismayed that the Government of Syria did not approve our request for a cross-line inter-agency convoy to eastern Aleppo city in May. The suspension of the activities of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in the east of the city over the past weeks is also a worrying development, as that organization is a key partner of the United Nations in Syria, and we call on all concerned to allow it to resume its activities in eastern Aleppo city as soon as possible. In fact, now, there is not a moment to lose.

We are reporting today on Aleppo, but make no mistake, indiscriminate attacks and the destruction of civilian infrastructure continue to inflict tremendous suffering on Syrians across the country. We are very concerned about the escalation of violence and the impact on civilians in other parts of the country; for example, in Dar'a, where there have been reports of heavy fighting between Government forces and non-State armed groups, including shelling and aerial bombardment over the past week.

The bottom line is that attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure need to stop immediately. There also needs to be full, unhindered, unconditional, safe and sustained access to all people in need, including in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, access for all types of assistance, including medical and surgical supplies. In short, all parties must finally and unequivocally live up to their obligations under international humanitarian law and the demands of the Council's resolutions.

My question to Council members today is again: how many more deaths, how much more suffering can we tolerate before there is a collective push towards an end to this senseless and shameful crisis affecting Syrians, their neighbours and many more people beyond?

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for responding rapidly to my request for an urgent meeting. I welcome the briefings by Under-Secretary-General Feltman and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien, and I welcome the fact that this is a public meeting of the Security Council.

Aleppo has been Syria's cultural capital for centuries, but in this conflict it has become a very different symbol, one of oppression and brutality, a symbol of Al-Assad's willingness to fight to the last breath, even if it means the very destruction of Syria itself. One need only glance at media reports from yesterday. At 11 a.m. local time, two barrel bombs fell on the Al-Huluk neighbourhood of Aleppo city. Four people were killed. Just after midday, regime shelling hit at least seven neighbourhoods. A couple of hours later, at 2.30 p.m., rockets hit the Al-Shaher neighbourhood. I could go on, but I think the point is clear: the cessation of hostilities has effectively ceased to exist in Aleppo. The city is burning; people are dying. In little over a week last month, 253 people were killed in Aleppo, 80 of them were women and children. As Dr. Abo El Ezz put it so painfully, "we are running out of coffins to bury our friends, family and colleagues".

The cessation of hostilities was supposed to be one of the three pillars of Special Envoy De Mistura's political settlement in Syria, but like the hospitals and houses of Aleppo, that pillar has been systematically attacked and degraded by the actions of the Al-Assad regime. Any trace of optimism from resolution 2268 (2016) has all but evaporated.

Through his actions, Al-Assad has shown that he has no commitment to a political settlement, no commitment to bringing peace to Syria. It has never been clearer: there can be no peace while he remains in power. How can he play a role in the future when he orders his forces to impede access to humanitarian aid in complete disregard of so many of our resolutions; when he wilfully denies those most in need of the very supplies that could save their lives; when he deliberately attacks hospitals, as we heard so painfully yesterday?

Al-Assad and his allies will point tc the threat of the terrorist group Jabhat al-Nusra in Aleppo. They will claim that their actions are in defence of the Syrian people. But how, under any circumstances, can the assault and encirclement of an entire city be justified? How can the shelling of hospitals and schools be justified? Those attacks amount to nothing more than barbaric collective punishment. They are war crimes. I agree with the Secretary-General: those responsible should be held fully accountable, including by the International Criminal Court.

The Council has an obligation to the people of Aleppo. We have an obligation to show that we are working for their protection, that we are trying to find that elusive political settlement that will end this war. What confidence can a man, woman or child in

Aleppo have in our words today? What faith can they place in any future cessation of hostilities when they have seen this one abused so violently? The only way to build back confidence, to restore that faith, is to stop the violence. We owe it to the people of Aleppo to be clear and candid about the efforts to stop those attacks. Without such clarity, how can they believe that a cessation of hostilities will not be used as cover for further military advances?

I therefore welcome the recent announcement about the agreement between the United States and Russia reaffirming the cessation of hostilities in Aleppo, Latakia and eastern Ghouta. But we must now see an immediate, positive response to that latest development. Only its full implementation will give the people of Syria that much needed clarity for actions speak louder than words.

To support that effort, the United Kingdom is today proposing a Security Council statement that condemns the violence in Aleppo and calls for an urgent end to the brutality. We owe it to the people of Aleppo, the living and the dead, to show that the Council can speak with one voice on that issue and that we can work together to bring this violence to an end. We cannot choose to do nothing in the face of such barbarity. To do so would be tantamount to collusion with the very forces destroying Aleppo.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Egyptian presidency of the Security Council for bringing us together today for this public debate on the situation in Syria, and more specifically in Aleppo. France took the initiative with the United Kingdom to call for this meeting. I also thank Mr. Feltman and Mr. O'Brien for their briefings.

The diplomatic process that was initiated in Vienna raised hopes when it ended on 27 February with the entry into force of a cessation of hostilities across the entire Syrian territory. France voted in favour of resolution 2268 (2016) and welcomed the agreement as a contribution to de-escalation and as an opportunity for Syrians to finally see the diplomatic process lead to a reduction in violence and an improvement in the situation for civilians. For almost a month, the cessation of hostilities helped the population enjoy an improvement that had not been seen since the conflict began five years ago, even if humanitarian progress has never yet met their expectations.

Since last month we are seeing that the fragile vessel of the cessation of hostilities is full of holes and today threatens to sink. Let us not mince words. The Damascus regime is the main party responsible and the new offensive launched by the regime on Aleppo city on 22 April is a flagrant and tragic example of that. In many respects, Aleppo is to Syria what Sarajevo was to Bosnia — a symbol, a crossroads, a martyr. Aleppo — a symbolic city that is thousands of years old and considered to be part of the world cultural heritage — is a crossroads where so many civilizations have clashed and merged, leaving a deep and diverse imprint. The city is now suffering martyrdom. That bastion of the moderate opposition has for four years resisted the continual assaults of Bashar Al-Assad's regime and of Da'esh.

We cannot turn a blind eye on those who seek to seize Aleppo by using the cessation of hostilities agreement as a smokescreen. That is all the more true because in its offensive against Aleppo the regime is using all means possible, including deliberate attacks on civilians. We are now seeing the consequences of that. The resumption of fighting has left over 280 dead in just a few days and caused a new flow of displaced persons to the Turkish border. The use of barrel bombs on populated residential areas, the very purpose of which is to spread terror among the population, has resumed. France has repeatedly denounced such acts.

Although the Security Council yesterday unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016) to protect medical personnel and facilities, the regime is deliberately, systematically and methodically targeting them. On 25 April, five White Helmets were killed after their centre at Al-Atareb, near Aleppo, was deliberately attacked. On 27 April, the Al-Quds hospital was deliberately bombed by the regime, with a raft of casualties. On 29 April, the Al-Marjeh health-care centre in Aleppo was completely destroyed. The regime of Bashar Al-Assad bears the full responsibility for the breakdown in the ceasefire in Aleppo. Faced with this spiral of violence, France and the United Kingdom felt duty-bound to call on the Security Council to convene this meeting.

At this very hour, the fragile agreement between the Russians and Americans that just entered into force is an encouraging sign, but it needs to be confirmed and then translated into facts on the ground. To restore the ceasefire across the entire Syrian territory and maintain the political momentum, we must do a great

deal more to ensure the cessation of hostilities is effectively respected. Otherwise, we will see a return to the horror and the resumption of clashes that, let us not forget, have led to over 400,000 deaths and millions of refugees and destroyed an entire country.

France believes that the Security Council has an important role to play in monitoring the observance of the ceasefire and to punish the most serious violations by mining the information to be relayed on a monthly basis by the Geneva task force, as requested under resolution 2268 (2016). In the meantime, the supporters of the regime must shoulder their responsibilities and use their influence on Damascus to ensure that the weapons are effectively silenced, because too often the regime pays lip service to an agreement only so as to violate it more thoroughly.

Last week, Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura alerted us collectively, stressing that the cessation of hostilities was in danger. We are convinced that a collective mobilization is necessary to respond urgently to that warning. For its part, France will spare no effort in that regard, on the basis of three major axes in particular.

After this meeting, we hope that the Council will be able to send a clear message on the need to end the fighting in Aleppo and to strengthen the cessation of hostilities. That will require nothing less than ensuring compliance with resolution 2268 (2016), which was adopted unanimously as a joint proposal of Russia and the United States. We must also continue to mobilize the international community to bring pressure to bear on the regime and to seek to rebuild positive momentum. It is in that spirit that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, and his German counterpart met today with Special Envoy De Mistura and the head of the moderate opposition, Riad Hijab.

Finally, as Staffan de Mistura did before this Council last week, France has been requesting for several days now that we organize, in short order, a ministerial meeting of the International Syria Support Group with three objectives in mind: first, to secure a more robust guarantee of respect for the ceasefire; secondly, to reaffirm the need to protect and provide assistance to civilian populations; and thirdly, to resume negotiations with a view to finding a political solution.

Ultimately, a single lodestar should guide us — to do everything to end the violence, in Aleppo and throughout Syria, and enable the resumption of negotiations aimed at implementing resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). There is no other alternative if we are to put an end to the Syrian tragedy.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the United Kingdom for having requested this urgent meeting of the Security Council.

Just yesterday, here in the Chamber, the President of Médecins Sans Frontières, who was seated exactly where the Syrian delegation is seated, stated that more than 300 attacks had occurred in Aleppo over the past few days, with hundreds of civilian deaths and the destruction of six medical facilities (see S/PV.7685). Last week in a closed meeting, we said what today we would like to repeat openly, with more urgency if necessary: we need to rectify the situation in Syria immediately, along the three tracks in this conflict, namely, the cessation of hostilities, the political negotiations and the desperate humanitarian situation. The Security Council must support the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, through bilateral efforts with the parties and through a statement on the three issues that I just mentioned. As the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General said, the priority now is the cessation of hostilities. All the parties to the conflict must urgently comply with the parameters established by resolution 2268 (2016). The next step must be a return to the negotiating table in order to take up the political transition in Syria once and for all.

The most recent attack on a hospital took place yesterday, launched by the opposition forces. That is in addition to other attacks committed by Government forces. All of them were of enormous seriousness. We demand once again that all the parties to the conflict, in particular the Government of Al-Assad, to respect international humanitarian law in the conduct of hostilities.

Mr. O'Brien said in closed consultations — and yesterday the President of Médecins Sans Frontières repeated it — that in Aleppo it is dangerous to live next to a hospital. Mr. O'Brien once again reminded us of that today. It is unbelievable that it is often more dangerous to be a doctor, a patient or a family member visiting a patient than it is to be a combatant.

Aleppo is the first opportunity to demonstrate that we take resolution 2268 (2016) seriously. As I said yesterday, our threshold of tolerance in the face of attacks against medical facilities and medical workers

should be zero. We want the medical workers and patients that still survive in Aleppo to be the first to see some kind of outcome from this resolution.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. I would also like to thank the United Kingdom for calling today's important meeting.

The city known today as Aleppo has been continuously inhabited for more than 7,000 years. Over the centuries, it has been won and lost by a succession of empires — the Greeks, the Romans, crusaders, the Ottomans and more. It has been home to diverse populations of traders and merchants, which included Muslims, Jews and Christians. That is not ancient history. Those influences have long been visible in the city's architecture, tasted in its food and felt in its culture. By the sixteenth century, it was famous enough for Shakespeare to cite it in *Othello* and *Macbeth*.

A city does not become one of the world's oldest without surviving great challenges. Aleppo has endured wars, occupations and earthquakes. In 1260 it survived a siege by the Mongols. After so many centuries, a city like this might seem able to survive anything. But in recent days, young Syrians have spread a slogan across social media: "Aleppo is burning". After five years of war, the recent explosion of violence has threatened what remains of the city. Just today, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, warned that continued violence could be catastrophic and that it could force 400,000 more residents to flee. Imagine the ripple effect and the consequences of that additional displacement.

To save Aleppo — what is left of Aleppo — we need progress on the same three fronts needed for peace in Syria overall. It is not that complicated. As Special Envoy De Mistura previously underscored, the three elements are stopping the fighting, improving humanitarian access and engaging in political negotiations to bring about transition. This year has actually shown that all three are possible — however belatedly, unevenly and imperfectly implemented — when there is political will. The cessation of hostilities has, up to this point, saved lives. Humanitarian access, while still grotesquely restricted, has improved modestly. And Special Envoy de Mistura has convened the parties for talks in Geneva. All three tracks are interlinked and interdependent and we cannot, as some have argued, neglect any one of them and expect the other two to succeed.

In recent days, as evidenced most clearly by what has occurred in Aleppo, all three of those tracks are in grave peril. First, as others have noted, across much of Aleppo, the cessation of hostilities has given way to horrific violence. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that more than 270 civilians were killed in Aleppo just since 22 April. While all sides have contributed to the violence, the military escalation was attributable largely to the actions of a single party — the Al-Assad regime. The regime launched more than 300 air strikes, 110 artillery strikes and 18 missiles, and dropped more than 68 bombs on the city over just these past two weeks, according to credible actors on the ground. All of that while still paying lip service to a cessation of hostilities. Against that backdrop, the United States has been working urgently with Special Envoy De Mistura and with the Russian Federation to reaffirm the cessation across the country. Through those efforts, the parties to the cessation agreed to recommit to the truce in Aleppo and its suburbs earlier today. The city has been calmer, and we urge all parties to comply fully so that hostilities actually cease — not just in Aleppo but across the country.

The regime and some of its supporters sometimes claim to be attacking the Al-Nusra Front or Da'esh, but the sites hit in Aleppo show otherwise. Consider this list of targets struck by the regime or its allies between 20 and 29 April — not ancient history, but rather a matter of the past couple of weeks. This list of targets was provided by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, which has proved highly reliable during the conflict: an ambulance in the Bab Al-Nairab neighbourhood, a public market in the district of Al-Sakhour, a civil defence centre in Al-Atarib, a bakery in Al-Ameriyeh, a school in the Bab Al-Hadid district and a mosque in the Al-Sukkari district. The distinction between civilians and military personnel and targets has to be respected in accordance with international law. Yet every day the photos and videos out of Aleppo show that that distinction has been obliterated.

It is important to note that violence by the Al-Nusra Front or Da'esh is violence by groups that are not a party to the cessation and are not protected by the cessation of hostilities. The rest of the opposition that signed up for the cessation and abided by it cannot be held responsible for the actions of terrorists who have

made no secret of their desire to keep fighting. Nobody benefits more from this war, and from the failure to reach a political solution and a political transition, than the terrorists. However, one cannot lump the like with the unlike, the innocent with the guilty.

These attacks have imposed an incalculable toll on Aleppo's civilians, and they contribute to a devastating humanitarian situation in the city. But the regime has also taken additional measures that show its overt intent to ratchet up civilian suffering in Aleppo. The Syrian Government has restricted humanitarian access and blocked aid, thereby undercutting that second element necessary for a peaceful resolution to be advanced. The International Syria Support Group (ISSG) has just been informed, as Under-Secretary-General O'Brien has just confirmed here today, that the regime has approved only eight deliveries for 25 per cent of people in the United Nations May delivery plan for besieged and hard-to-reach areas, and the Syrian Government did not approve any of the Aleppo locations in the United Nations May plan. Is that a coincidence or is it simply in keeping with the regime's massive offensive designed to terrorize the people of Aleppo?

Though the Council should need no reminder, resolution 2254 (2015) calls for rapid, safe and unhindered access throughout the country. Aleppo is a place of huge need right now. We often focus in our remarks on those who have been killed, but think of all of those who have been injured and are in desperate need of help. Resolution 2254 (2015) proscribes the removal of medicines and medical supplies from aid conveys, but, again, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has documented that that is a routine practice throughout Syria. It is the exception when medical supplies are actually allowed through on convoys. It is a rule, and a rule that is enforced across the board by the Syrian Government's bureaucracy, to remove medical supplies from convoys.

Just to give one example, on a recent convoy to Rastan, the authorities even went so far as to remove the scissors and anaesthetics from midwifery kits. Who does that? Let us be honest. The people who do that are people who do not give a damn what the Council prescribes. They do not care. They have stopped listening.

At the same time, the regime has deliberately targeted first-responders, health-care workers and medical facilities. Of the 33 hospitals open in Aleppo in 2010, fewer than 10 are reportedly functioning today. The most recent example, as we all know, was the loss of the Al-Quds hospital, which suffered a horrific attack that killed at least 50 civilians, including the city's last pediatrician, Dr. Muhammad Waseem Moaz, a man described by a colleague as the loveliest doctor in their hospital. He was a man who had sent his family to safety in Turkey, while he stayed behind to treat his patients. He was a man so committed to his people that he often slept in the hospital in case a child needed emergency help during the night.

According to Physicians for Human Rights, the attack that killed that great doctor along with so many others was actually the third strike on the hospital since the war began. That is not an accident. If you hit a hospital once by mistake, you can adjust your targeting and make allowances, but that was wilful targeting. At least six medical facilities throughout Aleppo were attacked during the past week, and the most recent attack, as we have heard, was yesterday against the Dabbit maternity clinic in regime-held territory where more civilians were killed. All of those attacks are reprehensible. Just yesterday, the Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016) on, inter alia, the importance of the protection of medical personnel and the importance of access to medical care in armed conflict. Every member of the Council voted in favour, and it is now time to call for its implementation in a real context — the context of Syria. And that means urgently pressing the regime and any group that would shell a hospital to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and cease targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and medical personnel.

That brings me to the third and final element necessary for progress towards the conflict's resolution: political negotiations aimed at political transition. After five years of war, it should be abundantly clear that the conflict will be settled only through political dialogue. Aleppo is a living monument to the belief that military force can achieve something for the people of Syria. The need for a political solution is precisely what the Council agreed in December 2015 when we adopted resolution 2254 (2015). Yet we have seen one party in particular renege on its commitments to a full cessation of hostilities nation-wide and to the full, rapid and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid, blatantly disregarding resolution 2254 (2015). That undermines the conditions needed for negotiations and makes

finding common ground and forging compromises exceedingly difficult.

Let me conclude. There is plenty of blame to go around for the worsening situation in Aleppo, but there can be no doubt about where the primary responsibility lies. It lies with the same regime that is responsible for committing similar offenses throughout the country: the one that has laid siege to 15 cities throughout Syria and restricted access to aid for millions of Syrians, leading to the preventable deaths of countless civilians; the one responsible for 12 of the 13 attacks on medical facilities, recorded from January through March by Physicians for Human Rights, and 24 of the 25 deaths that resulted from those strikes; the regime responsible for last week's air strikes against a Syrian civil-defence station in the town of Al-Atareb in Aleppo Province, which killed five brave men who volunteered to serve their communities as first-responders: Ahmad Abdullah, Khaled Bashar, Ahmad Mahmoud, Hamdo Haj Ibrahim and Hussain Ismail — the most recent casualties among the more than 115 white helmets, who have died in the line of duty since the war began; and the same party and the same regime responsible for the vast majority of the 400,000 deaths — and counting — in the conflict.

The party primarily responsible for the burning in Aleppo is a United Nations Member State. That should revolt us. The party is a United Nations Member State indifferent and cold to the ghastly suffering of its people. That should galvanize and unite us. All those with influence, particularly Russia and Iran, must press the regime to meet its commitments and obligations. For our part, the United States will continue pressing the opposition to do the same. We will work with our Russian counterparts to try to restore a real and lasting cessation of hostilities in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria and facilitate a political transition away from Al-Assad — the only way in which this war will finally end. The entire ISSG is going to have to be a part of making that happen.

Today, a Syrian surgeon in Aleppo, Dr. Osama Abo El Ezz, wrote in the *New York Times* of losing so many of his close friends who were medical professionals over the last five years. Over the past week, he wrote, "The bombardment has reached such ferocity that even the stones are catching fire". Of the cessation of hostilities, he wrote,

> "Imperfect though it was, it offered Syrian civilians a brief respite from five years of violence. People had begun to recover during the truce, to get their lives back."

He continued to recount that now, people in Aleppo are waiting for death and even praying for it in some instances to take them away from "this burning city", as he put it. All of us here must work relentlessly to restore and maintain the respite from violence, for which Syrians yearn and which they deserve, to ensure that they receive vital humanitarian aid to survive — many are on death's door right now as we sit here — and to build the political solution, which is the only escape from the daily inferno.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Jeffrey Feltman and Stephen O'Brien for their briefings.

As a result of the cessation of hostilities, which was put in place thanks to the leading role of the Russian Federation and the United States and confirmed in resolution 2268 (2016), the level of violence in Syria has significantly decreased. That move was a real breakthrough in the protracted conflict. New prospects for a peaceful resolution have opened up, and the Syrians have to decide for themselves the parameters of that peaceful resolution with the support of the United Nations.

Overall, the two rounds of negotiations went very well. However, not all of the opposition forces showed a willingness to reach an agreement. Once again, a separate position was adopted by the Riyadh group, which still has not formulated a clear position. In many parts of Syria the truce has been observed. Numerous armed units and towns are joining the truce, thanks to the efforts of the Syria Reconciliation Centre opened by Russia in Hmeymim. Today, there are 90 such towns covered by the truce. At the same time, hundreds of meetings with the city elders, field commanders and representatives of local administrations have been carried out. And in a number of provinces, peaceful life is slowly returning.

We should not question the radical improvement of the situation resulting from the implementation of the cessation of hostilities, which has, however, spurred on others who are interested in perpetuating the Syrian conflict. We also believe that it is counter-productive to express public criticism about unverified incidents simply to add new charges against the Syrian Government. That has occurred more than once. The deterioration in certain areas of Syria, including Aleppo,

is a serious source of concern. Government forces are fighting off a large-scale offensive by the jihadists. In the past few days, we have seen a significant increase in shelling from the parts of the city controlled by jihadists. So-called hell's cannons are being used — gas canisters packed with tiny metal fragments, which have a devastating effect. Those weapons are by definition indiscriminate and are meant to destroy and terrorize the civilian population.

We were long promised that the armed units of the so-called moderate opposition would break off all links with Al-Nusra, withdraw from the territories they occupy and clearly state their readiness to take part in the peace settlement. That has not occurred so far, which raises the question of whether the political will exists among those who have an influence on the various players. We are beginning to get the impression that external sponsors cannot or do not want to influence the Syrian opposition groups in order to force them to distance themselves from the terrorists.

Russia and the United States of America, as co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group, are ready to continue working together to ensure de-escalation. At least that is how we would like to see the situation to evolve. Russian and American military experts are working together on a daily basis. As we speak, a joint centre for rapid response to breaches of the cessation of hostilities has begun to operate on a permanent basis in Geneva, maximizing the effective monitoring of the situation. It must be said say that, from the very beginning of our increased participation in the Syrian situation in October, Russia has proposed such cooperation to the United States. Unfortunately, it has taken more than six months to achieve it, but we hope that this will be an important step in our efforts to stop the bloodshed in Syria.

Thanks to the efforts in the military and political spheres, calm has been restored in Latakia and eastern Ghouta, with the aim of making it permanent. Russia and the United States, with the agreement of the Government of Syria and the moderate opposition, hoped to introduce a regime of calm in Aleppo on 3 May. However, that planned timetable was derailed by attacks by terrorist groups. That day, the insurgents sought to break the defences through coordinated offences from the west, preceded by a massive artillery bombardment. Jabhat Al-Nusra, Ahrar ash-Sham, Jaish al-Islam, Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki and local criminal groups took part in the offensive. All those groups shelled residential areas the whole day long; in particular, the Martyrs of Badr Brigade claimed responsibility for the destruction of Al-Dabit maternity hospital. Over the past 24 hours, dozens of people were killed and hundreds were wounded.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Jabhat Al-Nusra and other terrorist groups are excluded from the cessation of hostilities regime. It is unacceptable to pause in the fight with terrorists so as to allow them to regroup. No one will spare the terrorists and those who are in breach of the cessation of hostilities required United Nations resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016).

We would add that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has genuine evidence of the use of mustard gas in Syria, and thee are serious grounds to believe that war gases are being used by terrorists. There is an alarming risk that they have the capacity to produce toxic substances, as recently confirmed by the Director-General of the OPCW. It is unfortunate that, just when we need to take all necessary steps to impede the activities of chemical terrorists, some Western members of the Council, under contrived pretexts, are stifling the Russian-Chinese initiative aimed at neutralizing the threat of the production of chemical weapons by terrorists in and around Syria.

We need to pursue our very serious work on the issue of the Syrian peace settlement and support for Russian-American efforts. Let us speak clearly — we need to put an end to all provocations once and for. It is clear that without external support for terrorist groups in Syria, they could not operate on such a scale. We need help in cutting off supplies to terrorists, first and foremost across the Syrian-Turkish border. Parties under patronage should be compelled to come to the negotiating table, which will contribute to ensuring peace in Syria. I would like to repeat in a slightly different form a rhetorical question posed by one speaker: How could you allow the destruction of an ancient country in a prolonged, bloody conflict to achieve the geopolitical aims of one party or its partners?

We hope that the Geneva talks will resume in May and lead the way to further negotiations. We call on all sides to participate constructively in dialogue and to refrain from threats or sabotage. As for the press statement proposed by the United Kingdom, we will of course consider it, but we would have viewed it as a truly serious attempt to urge the Security Council

to contribute to the maintenance of the cessation of hostilities if the delegation of the United Kingdom had consulted with the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group, Russia and the United States, which are spearheading the ceasefire efforts. As I see it now, it is more of a propaganda gesture. However, we will take a look at the text and consult with our military colleagues, who, alongside our American colleagues, are doing relevant work in Geneva.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): We too wish to thank the United Kingdom for convening today's meeting. We think it is very timely to have an open discussion in the Chamber about the situation in Syria, and in particular the situation in Aleppo.

New Zealand has been deeply concerned about the violence in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria. We continue to be shocked at the apparent indifference of the parties to the war and all of their backers to the appalling suffering of the Syrian people. The escalation of violence in and around Aleppo shows that the parties have been continuing to pursue their objectives by military means. And yet, as we have said so many times in the Chamber and in the adjacent consultation room, there can be no military solution to the conflict. We welcome the news that it has been agreed between the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the cessation of hostilities to Aleppo, Latakia and eastern Ghouta. But if peace is to have any chance, there must be a full re-establishment of the cessation of hostilities to all of Syria and a genuine recommitment to the peace process.

All sides must invest fully in the political process. That means respecting international humanitarian law. It means respecting the Council's resolutions, and it means prioritizing the welfare of the Syrian people over narrow political and military aims. The current political process, established at the end of 2015 under resolution 2268 (2015), represents the best chance we have had in five years to end this awful war. We cannot afford to miss that opportunity. We all have a responsibility to support the talks, to support the Special Envoy and to pressure the parties at the negotiating table to participate in good faith.

In our view, good faith means increasing access for humanitarian aid, negotiating the release of detainees, stopping the fighting and engaging on the substance of a political transition. It also means stopping attacks on schools and hospitals and allowing medical supplies to be delivered in humanitarian convoys. Just yesterday, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016), reminding combatants of the rules of armed conflict, demanding protection for those who provide health care, and demanding accountability for those who flout those rules. Most of all, good faith in this context means adhering to the spirit of the cessation of hostilities, which means stopping the fighting and attempts to grab land.

What has happened in Aleppo in the past few days was all too predictable, as we heard reports over the past two weeks from United Nations representatives. While we have understood that there have been efforts to battle Al-Nusra, it is hard not to conclude that what has happened has all been part of an elaborate plan to seize Syria's second-largest city before the peace talks got seriously under way.

New Zealand is fully committed to international efforts to combat terrorism. As we have said in the Council Chamber and in the adjacent room, this should be an issue that unites us, but it has not been, and there has been a growing tendency to use the words "terrorism" and "terrorists" loosely in justification for any military response. That must stop. Any military action needs to be carried out with full respect for international humanitarian law. This of course means avoiding attacks on civilians and civilian targets. The requirements of distinction and proportionality and the prohibition on indiscriminate attacks must be respected, even when fighting terrorists. If the cessation of hostilities and the peace process are to have any chance of succeeding, greater care is required to distinguish between those groups that are participants in the peace process and those that are outside it, and greater weight given to the overall political need to advance the peace process.

The talks that have been under way between the United States and Russia, in coordination with the Special Envoy and others in the region, are the best chance we have in the short term to make progress and to see an end to fighting, particularly in and around Aleppo. We welcome those talks, we welcome the recent announcement, and we look forward to further progress in such areas as further geographical delineation and other measures to help restore and sustain the cessation of hostilities.

While the United States and Russian efforts are critical, the United States and Russia are not the

only actors that can make a difference. New Zealand supports the International Syria Support Group and the Security Council putting their weight behind the political talks. We are open to any course of action that would be helpful and effective and would welcome the views of the Special Envoy, the United States and Russia in particular on how this Council might best support their efforts.

We all need to remember that the stakes are high. The breakdown of the peace process would be catastrophic for the Syrian people and for preserving what remains of this shattered country. We look forward to discussing the press statement just circulated by the United Kingdom and to early agreement upon it.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I would like to thank the delegation of the United Kingdom and the Egyptian presidency for initiating and convening this very timely open briefing. My special gratitude goes to the briefers for their detailed overview of the current situation in Aleppo, in particular, and in Syria, in general.

Ukraine strongly condemns the air strikes and indiscriminate shelling carried out in and around Aleppo over the recent period, which took the lives of more than 250 people and left thousands injured and wounded. Last week's bombardment of Al-Quds hospital in the innocent Sukkari neighbourhood of Aleppo led to the death of two doctors, including the only paediatrician in the city, three medical support staff and dozens of patients, among them children. Yesterday and yet another hospital in Aleppo, Al-Dabit hospital, came under fire. At least three people were killed and dozens of civilians were wounded.

The escalation of violence has also been observed in other parts of Syria, for example, in Dar'a, where heavy fighting and aerial bombardments have resumed. We commend the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his efforts in bringing the cessation of hostilities in Syria back on track. But how can that be achieved when the Government pushes on with a military offensive in Aleppo, provoking a further escalation in fighting that leads to the death of scores of civilians trapped in the city?

We have heard the claims that Al-Nusra was being targeted. However, it is not acceptable that, in the process, hospitals and the city's other vital infrastructure had to be destroyed, leaving thousands of civilians without water, electricity, medical care and food. It is hard to believe that such an offensive by the Syrian regime would be possible without the approval of if major ally, which poses itself as a mediator in the negotiating process. Amazingly enough, that very delegation moments ago tried to convince us that "recently the situation in Syria has radically improved".

The aerial bombardments must stop. The indiscriminate attacks against civilians must stop. Only an immediate recommitment to the cessation of hostilities, which must include Aleppo, can alleviate the plight of the Syrian people. Against the backdrop of the rapidly increasing violence in and around Aleppo, Ukraine considers the unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict to be very timely and an extremely important step. We call on all sides to fully respect that resolution's provisions. The failure to do that will lead to the collapse of the cessation of hostilities and bring more violence death and destruction, while further undermining the prospects for finding a negotiated solution to the Syrian conflict. In this regard, we call upon all parties to strictly comply with their obligations under resolution 2268 (2016) on the cessation of hostilities and resume substantive talks in Geneva on all aspects stipulated in resolution 2254 (2015).

Finally, I wish to put on record the strong support of our delegation for the draft press statement circulated by the United Kingdom just now. It deserves urgent approval and it does not deserve at all to be labelled as a propagandistic step, as the Russian delegation has alleged. We urge other members of the Council to seriously consider it.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I thank the president for convening this meeting on Aleppo. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Under-Secretaries-General Feltman and O'Brien for their detailed briefings.

It was almost two months ago that we unanimously adopted resolution 2268 (2016), endorsing in full the United States-Russian Federation joint statement on the cessation of hostilities in Syria. After the adoption of this resolution, we saw some remarkable developments in the Syrian political process and considerable improvement in humanitarian access. Since the crisis is far from coming to an end, however, we cannot be satisfied with these temporary achievements.

At the same time, we should admit that the cessation of hostilities gave hope to the Syrian people. Now such hope is being lost in Syria, especially in Aleppo, an important Middle East cultural heritage site. We see

an escalation of violence and fighting in Aleppo. In this context, we welcome the latest news of agreement between the United States and Russia towards extending the cessation of hostilities to Aleppo. We hope this welcome effort will be implemented.

Japan strongly urges all parties to fully implement resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016). Yesterday, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016), which addresses the protection of medical personnel and facilities. That resolution does not focus on any specific conflict area. However, Syria, in particular Aleppo, is a typical situation that the resolution envisages.

For the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) in Aleppo, the role of States with influence on the ground is critical. Japan urges all State, in particular the Syrian Arab Republic and the States members of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) to thoroughly implement this resolution.

On the draft press statement circulated a few moments ago by the United Kingdom, I support the idea of sending a clear message of the Council. The draft seems to capture all important points.

In conclusion, I would like to state the Japan will continue to work with members of the Council and the ISSG for a lasting political settlement through assistance that gives the people of Syria hope for a better future.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the delegations of the United Kingdom and France for requesting this meeting. I would like to thank the President for having managed to do whatever it took to make this meeting happen.

I would also like to thank Mr. Feltman and Mr. O'Brien for their briefings. I am not losing hope that one of these days Mr. O'Brien might enter the Chamber and say "I have some good news." But in the four months that I have been here, unfortunately, reality in all its cruelty has been imposed on us. Some 50 years ago, speaking of another war, the American poet, Robert Allen Zimmerman, better known as Bob Dylan, asked the question:

(*spoke in English*)

> "How many deaths will it take till he knows
> That too many people have died?"

The question remains as valid today as it was then. How many more deaths will we have to see? How many more hospitals will need to be destroyed? How many more children will have to be killed? How many more? It would seem that for some people, certain games are more important than the lives of human beings.

In an intergovernmental organization such as ours, the main responsibility for such issues falls on States, particularly those most directly involved and especially those that are directly involved and support one party to the conflict or another. We welcome the joint efforts of the United States and Russia that have allowed the cessation of hostilities to include Aleppo. Syria is suffering and Aleppo is suffering. We therefore hope they will be able to exert the necessary pressure on the various actors on the ground.

We must not forget that, in the confusion prevailing on the ground in areas where various non-State armed groups are taking part in the combat, any non-State group that crosses the border — even if it is merely circumstantially allied with a terrorist group — is as much a terrorist as the terrorist group itself. Consequently, the main countries currently involved in the negotiations should exert all possible influence on any party over which they have influence in order to affect the situation on the ground.

Uruguay remains ready to support efforts and initiatives aimed at strengthening the cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access and the political process — the famous three pacts mentioned by Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We will continue to devote all our efforts to that end.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I too thank Mr. Feltman and Mr. O'Brien for their briefings, amd the delegations of France and the United Kingdom for requesting this urgent meeting of the Council, following the unprecedented escalation of violence taking place in Aleppo. A city that has for millennia been the cradle of rich cultures and civilizations, with a place on the World Heritage List, Aleppo has borne the brunt of the Syrian crisis since the end of the cessation of hostilities.

The hope raised by the cessation of hostilities agreement soon gave way to unrestrained attacks on the civilian population due to multiple violations of the February agreement, as has just been confirmed by the briefers. With several hundred dead in the past few days, the city has been the site of indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including women and children,

and on medical facilities and markets by parties to the conflict. Unfortunately, the same situation prevails in Homs, Damascus and Deir ez-Zor, to name just a few, where clashes have led to heavy civilian losses.

Given that alarming situation, the Senegalese delegation strongly condemns those violations, which the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has rightly described as displaying monstrous contempt for the lives of civilians. It is equally important at this critical stage in the peace negotiations to urge all parties to abide by the February cessation of hostilities agreement, which was endorsed by the Council in resolution 2268 (2016), and to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law.

These clashes have come at a special juncture in the negotiating process among the parties to the conflict, led by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. Senegal therefore welcomes the meetings among the Secretary of State of the United States and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Saudi Arabia, France and Germany in an effort to promote an atmosphere conducive to a resumption of the ceasefire. We dare to hope that, with the valuable assistance of the International Syria Support Group, those efforts will bear fruit for the civilian victims of the crisis, which is now in its fifth year. Now more than ever, it is the Council's responsibility to ensure that peace talks resume, with a genuine ceasefire in place, and that a political transition is led by Syrians in a spirit of reconciliation.

In view of the ongoing significant impact of terrorism on the conflict in Syria, my delegation wishes to firmly condemn the persistent terrorist attacks on civilians in Syria, as is currently the case in Aleppo. Given the situation, Senegal believes it necessary that we issue a statement to send a clear message to the parties to the conflict.

In conclusion, I reiterate my delegation's full support for the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. Likewise, we welcome the agreement between Russia and the United States, which has just been announced, and call on the members of the International Syria Support Group to continue to strengthen their meaningful contribution to a political settlement based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and resolutions 2254 (2015) 2268 (2016).

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting on the situation in Aleppo and the briefings provided by Mr. Feltman and Mr. O'Brien.

My delegation has been closely following developments in Aleppo and is concerned that the situation on the ground may threaten the progress made since the the cessation of hostilities began. However, we believe that the political forum in Geneva should be maintained and strengthened. There is no doubt that the cessation of hostilities has had a positive impact on the peace negotiations. The scenario in Syria has changed in recent months, especially in late February when various opposition groups joined the peace process, while other groups continued to coordinate their military operations with the Al-Nusra Front, as we have seen in Aleppo and other Syrian cities.

The negotiations among the parties in Geneva, as part of the peace process led by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, should be resumed as soon as possible and without conditions. We reiterate our support for Mr. De Mistura in pushing for a comprehensive peace process that will prioritize negotiations as the only way to end the vicious war that has afflicted that country over the past five years. To that end, we urge the Syrian opposition to display a constructive attitude and commit to working to combat Al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). We emphasize that such terrorist groups are not covered under resolution 2268 (2016) and must be fought and overthrown in accordance with international law.

Regarding the peace negotiations, we believe that the decision of the opposition's Riyadh platform does not contribute to the definitive settlement for Syria that we all desire. We therefore hope that the countries concerned can exercise their influence to persuade the opposition to join the political negotiations, rejecting the extremist violence of ISIS and Al-Nusra, which represent a threat to international peace and security, and to return to the negotiating table as soon as possible. We hope that all the ethnic factions and minorities, such as the Kurds, who are an important factor to bringing about peace in Syria, will be represented. We must ensure that every sector of civil society in Syria, including women, participates in the peace talks.

We recognize that the progress that has been made would not have been possible without the participation of the International Syria Support Group and its task

force in helping to monitor the cessation of hostilities and ensure humanitarian access. We believe that the humanitarian response should be guided by a neutral, balanced approach so as to ensure that it is not politicized. In that regard, Member States should work to ensure that the humanitarian response reaches every sector of society. We condemn the indiscriminate attacks on hospitals and medical facilities and on civilians in those facilities. We would like to recall that such facilities are protected under international humanitarian law and therefore should not be military targets, as provided for in resolution 2286 (2016), which the Council adopted unanimously yesterday.

We must continue to urge for a lasting peace settlement. We hope the peace process in Syria will be supported by the people of Syria themselves, without foreign interference, where the common interest should be in attaining a country free of terrorists and focused on its future. Lastly, any solution to the armed conflict should be political and peaceful, signaling peace for the people of Syria with respect for the country's independence and territorial integrity.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for their briefings.

The recent escalation of the conflict in some parts of Syria, especially Aleppo, has resulted in large numbers of casualties among civilians and medical and humanitarian relief workers. China sympathizes deeply with the Syrian people in their suffering. We condemn all attacks on civilian and humanitarian facilities.

The Syrian conflict cannot be settled by military means, which will result only in greater unrest and disaster. In that regard, China appreciates the new round of efforts made by the Russian Federation and the United States. The top priority now is for the parties in Syria to put the interests of their nation and people above everything else, cherish their hard-won ceasefire, abide strictly by the relevant Security Council resolutions, implement the agreement on the cessation of hostilities effectively and end all attacks on civilian and humanitarian facilities immediately in order to regain the earlier momentum of the ceasefire. The implementation of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities has played an important role in expanding the humanitarian relief operations and advancing the Geneva peace talks.

In spite of the recent escalation of tensions in some areas of Syria, in most parts of the country the ceasefire has by and large been maintained. The international community and the parties concerned should adopt effective measures as soon as possible to consolidate the results that have been achieved so far. Other countries in the region should act in the interests of maintaining regional peace and stability generally and play a constructive role in achieving a full ceasefire and a halt to the violence in Syria. The members of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) should work together and consult as soon as possible on specific measures for controlling the situation, thereby creating conditions conducive to advancing the political process in Syria and expanding humanitarian relief operations.

The Geneva peace talks have recently managed to make progress despite difficulties and setbacks, with the parties to the talks reaching a preliminary understanding on some aspects. China appreciates the important role that has been played in that regard by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. The more complex the situation in Syria, the more essential it is to pursue a political settlement without wavering, to insist on enabling the Syrian people themselves to decide their country's future and destiny and on the role of the United Nations as the main conduit for good offices, to firmly support the work of Special Envoy de Mistura and ensure that the next round of the peace talks in Geneva is resumed as soon as possible. The parties in Syria should work on the principle of addressing the easier issues first and moving to more difficult ones, meeting each other halfway, establishing mutual trust and gradually arriving at a solution acceptable to all.

Countering terrorism is an important component of the efforts to address the Syrian issue. If terrorism is not eradicated, the Syrian people will have no peace and the countries of the region will have no security. International cooperation in fighting terrorism must adhere to uniform standards and make full use of the leading and coordinating role of the United Nations and its Security Council. We should do all we can to fight all those identified as terrorists by the Council. Recently, terrorist groups have frequently used chemical materials as weapons, and the international community must come up with effective ways to respond to that issue as soon as possible.

As a permanent member of the Security Council and a member of the ISSG, China has been working

tirelessly to achieve a political settlement of the Syrian question. At a meeting of ISSG foreign ministers, Mr. Wang Yi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, laid out China's four-point proposal for a settlement and put forward a specific programme for advancing the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, expediting progress on humanitarian relief work and advancing the political process. The special envoy for Syria of the Chinese Government recently visited Geneva, Syria and other countries concerned to engage in an in-depth exchange of views with the parties involved on the maintenance of the cessation of hostilities, the expansion of humanitarian relief and the advancement of the Geneva peace talks. We will continue to play an active and constructive role in advancing a comprehensive, equitable and appropriate settlement of the Syrian question.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): The beginning of the year seemed to offer fresh and renewed hope for the people of Syria. A breakthrough was made in securing access for humanitarian assistance for more than 500,000 people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. The violence was significantly reduced, thanks to the agreement on a cessation of hostilities. Most importantly, peace talks aimed at solving the political deadlock had finally gained some traction. However, in recent weeks the fighting in Aleppo has intensified. It appears that the fragile cessation of hostilities is no longer holding and has collapsed there. We cannot allow the progress so painstakingly made thus far to unravel.

I would like to thank Mr. Feltman and Mr. O'Brien for their comprehensive briefings on the latest developments in Aleppo. We also thank the United Kingdom for requesting today's urgent Council meeting in the light of the deteriorating situation in Aleppo.

It was only yesterday that the Council adopted the landmark resolution 2286 (2016), which seeks to protect the wounded and sick and medical and humanitarian personnel and their supplies and facilities. Yet on the very same day, the Al-Dabit maternity hospital in Aleppo was struck, with at least three medical staff members and patients killed. It seems that scant, if any, respect is accorded for the neutrality and impartiality of medical facilities. It is all the more telling when six medical centres have been attacked in less than a week. We wish to reaffirm that such attacks, whether premeditated or otherwise, are simply unacceptable. Reports of the Government's aim to encircle eastern Aleppo, placing its residents under one of the largest sieges of the conflict, are alarming. Besieging that territory would inevitably lead to another catastrophic humanitarian situation. The Security Council is duty-bound to ensure that the calamity in the four towns of Madaya, Fo'ah, Kafraya and Zabadani is not repeated in Aleppo.

We welcome and support the talks between Special Envoy De Mistura and the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Germany and France, as well as the head of the opposition, Mr. Riyad Hijab. In addition to the truce brokered by the Russian Federation and the United States in Latakia and near Damascus last week, we welcome the news of the days of silence beginning last night in Aleppo. A full and immediate restoration of the truce in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria is key if we are to rebuild confidence, which was shattered by the sharp escalation of violence and hostilities in recent weeks.

With the start of the days of silence in Aleppo and other areas, we call on the parties to the conflict to commit to the following provisions. First, they should immediately cease hostilities and attacks against civilians and civilian objects. Secondly, they should allow safe, unimpeded and unhindered humanitarian access to the population in Aleppo. We stress that the delivery of humanitarian assistance must be allowed to reach all civilians regardless of their political affiliations. Thirdly, they should build on the consensus among the Government and opposition groups during the most recent round of peace talks on the necessity for a political transition in Syria. Fourthly, they should urgently engage with the United Nations, in particular Special Envoy De Mistura, with a view to resuming the peace talks in Geneva and recommencing their deliberations, based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015), including on the political transition.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We thank Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, for their briefings.

We are extremely concerned about the latest developments in Aleppo and the pattern of systematic destruction of the city, as Under-Secretary-General Feltman put it, and about the heavy loss of life due to the brutal clashes between rebel groups and Government forces in this divided Syrian city. The senseless bloodshed must stop immediately.

The deal struck by the United States and Russia to stop the bloodshed in Aleppo must deliver, and deliver without further delay. The surge in fighting over the past two weeks has already cost hundreds of lives and, unfortunately, the nationwide cessation of hostilities, which we hoped could hold, is on the verge of collapse. Even though we all know, including the parties to the conflict, that a military solution is not possible, the reality on the ground is that neither side wants to relinquish its positions and both seem intent on undermining the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy De Mistura to solve the crisis through dialogue and negotiations. That is, of course, due in large part to the fact that the Security Council and international and regional stakeholders remain divided and continue backing the opposing sides in this sinister, devastating war.

On previous occasions in which we have exchanged views with Special Envoy De Mistura, there was still some hope that the Geneva process, which brought together so many stakeholders and established a series of deadlines for transition and constitutional reform, could be successful. We genuinely believed that the cessation of hostilities would create space for dialogue and peace. However, the current reality on the ground makes it clear that the parties concerned are not interested in dialogue, but rather in playing strategic games. The situation is further complicated by the presence of various terrorist groups in civilian areas and by the fact that those groups are not part of any negotiating process or ceasefire agreements.

Even though the fight against terrorists is a top priority, concerted efforts must be pursued, in particular by the International Syria Support Group ceasefire task force, by urging the parties committed to the Geneva process to put an end to military offensives — offensives that do not specifically target terrorist groups. Also, considering that the humanitarian situation is getting worse every day, we strongly urge all parties to respect the cessation of hostilities proposal, act accordingly and immediately allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical evacuations.

It is unfortunate that Security Council statements have so little effect on the parties to the conflict. However, we must continue making our voices heard until reason finally prevails. Inaction on this issue will be felt for generations. We therefore sincerely hope that the Geneva process will not collapse and that the parties will put down their weapons and resume negotiating a peaceful political transition.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Egypt.

I address the Security Council today not only in my capacity as a representative of a member State of the Security Council, but also as an Arab and as an Egyptian citizen who is tormented by the tragedy that the Syrian people are facing owing to an armed conflict that has been raging on for five years.

The Syrian popular movement started in March, 2011. It was a peaceful movement that sought change. However, many factors led to an increase in protests, confrontations and the killing of innocent people. The situation has deteriorated over the past five years. External interference in Syrian affairs has increased in an unprecedented manner. Militias, foreign terrorist fighters and weapons have been given access to Syria to fight on behalf of external and internal parties. The peaceful movement soon disappeared and the situation deteriorated into a proxy armed conflict. The Syrian territory became a safe haven for terrorism, sectarianism and chaos.

Following long years of Syrian suffering, the international community has recently been able, for the first time, through the Security Council and the International Syria Support Group, to reach consensus on a political solution. It is important to stress that the international consensus has been based on certain parallel pillars, which are as follows: first, putting an end to the hostilities in Syria in order to achieve a nationwide ceasefire; secondly, achieving political transition through negotiations between the Syrian Government and the broadest possible spectrum of the opposition, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex); thirdly, improving the humanitarian situation and ensuring humanitarian access to people in need in Syria, including in besieged areas; and, fourthly, combating terrorism and extremism.

Despite the clarity of the elements of the international consensus and their compliance with humanitarian and political law, and despite the positive developments on the ground in Syria since the beginning of the cessation of hostilities, we have been surprised once again by the renewed heavy fighting in Aleppo and the deaths of many civilians and innocent people. In that regard, I

would like to reiterate once again that Egypt condemns the shelling of civilians, especially the shelling of hospitals and the harrowing scenes resulting from the shelling. I would also like to stress the need for all parties in Syria to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure access to humanitarian and medical assistance. Egypt is committed to cooperating with its partners in the Council to ensure respect for resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical personnel and medical facilities in time of war. The Council adopted the resolution yesterday based on a draft resolution submitted by Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay.

Counter-terrorism remains one of the main pillars to settle the Syrian crisis and to maintain international peace and security. However, certain Powers continue to be reluctant to take action, and that impedes a solution. Some still believe that they are immune to the dangers of terrorism and that they will be able to take advantage of terrorism if they choose to neglect or support it. It may be high time to be honest with ourselves and to set matters straight. The Council and the members of the International Syria Support Group have agreed on excluding terrorist organizations from the ceasefire. However, a noticeable reluctance in confronting this danger and an inexplicable politicization have allowed the Al-Nusra Front, or the Al-Qaida affiliate in Syria, to take advantage of the cessation of hostilities to gain more ground in the country, especially in Aleppo. The Al-Nusra Front has been able to increase recruitment into its ranks and to contain some of the armed factions that have not been designated as terrorist organizations. Those factions continue to ignore the de-escalation. They insist on cooperating and coordinating with the Al-Nusra Front even after two months of the start of the cessation of hostilities and despite the pleas that they distance themselves from those terrorist organizations. That is unacceptable and should not go unnoticed.

I take this opportunity to call once again on the International Syria Support Group, especially the co-Chairs — the United States of America and Russia — to put an end to that reluctance and prevarication. The Al-Nusra Front and its allies are as dangerous as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. Neither the people of Syria nor the countries and the peoples of the region will accept them as part of their present or future.

The Syrian people is the sole party to bear the brunt of the Syrian tragedy. Syrian blood has been shed because of the interest of States and groups and because of misleading facts. Children and women have suffered. We need to thwart the narrow interests that have controlled the fate of the Syrian people over the past few years. If the situation continues, it will jeopardize the future of the people of Syria. Therefore, I would like to reiterate that the Geneva process, mediated by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, according to resolution 2254 (2015), which seeks to reach a political transition in Syria, remains the only beacon of hope for a settlement. I call on all members of the international community to stand behind the process and behind the Special Envoy in good faith. I call on them to give the utmost priority to the interests of the Syrian people, free from trying to settle political scores and promoting other interests.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Egypt's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

Yesterday, in Aleppo city alone, 28 civilians were killed, including infants, in addition to 80 persons who were wounded following the targeting by armed terrorist groups — or the "moderate opposition", as some in the Council like to call them — of the Al-Zubayr maternity hospital and many neighbourhoods in Aleppo. Regrettably, the number of fatalities is likely to increase, as there are many critically wounded people.

At this point, I say to the representatives of States that they either support or cover up terrorist acts in Syria: Enough hypocrisy, enough politicization and enough playing with the blood of Syrians. How can the opposition be called moderate when it kills infants in medical facilities and when it bombs civilians indiscriminately on a daily basis? How can that opposition be moderate when it rains down thousands of indiscriminate shells on Aleppo, when it has used light and heavy rockets, explosive shells, gas canisters and mortars to kill more than 118 civilians, wounding more than 206 people, including women, children and elderly just in the past 10 days? This is the very embodiment of terrorism. It cannot be called by any other name.

All this escalation by armed , with the Al-Nusra Front and allied groups at the helm, was not coincidental.

It came in the wake of the failure by those terrorist organizations to carry out a wide-ranging attack from many points against Aleppo city under orders from well-known States. The attack coincided with the withdrawal of the so-called Al-Riyadh delegation from the latest round of the Geneva talks. Two things should therefore be clear to everyone.

First, the Syrian Government has participated in the Geneva talks, in good faith and with full seriousness, in order to reach a political settlement to the crisis in Syria. For its part, the Al-Riyadh delegation came with the prior intention to abort the talks. That was made quite clear in its withdrawal from the latest round of talks.

Secondly, the Syrian Government has abided by the cessation of hostilities agreement based on its desire to protect the blood of innocent Syrians, to restore security and stability and to combat terrorism. At the same time, the armed groups allied with the terrorists of Jabhat Al-Nusra have violated the agreement, particularly in Aleppo. That is a manifestation of the threats made by the Al-Riyadh delegation, which has called for burning Syrian cities, thereby confounding the agreement, and for an escalation of military activities against the Syrian Government, thereby flouting the cessation of hostilities and all the efforts made to date to stem the bloodshed of innocent civilians and free them from the cycle of political pressures. What the Syrian Government has been doing in Aleppo city is merely fulfilling its obligation to protect its citizens from terrorism, a response to escalation, killing and destruction by terrorist groups in the city.

Today I would reiterate that the Syrian Government is prepared to effectively participate in any sincere effort aimed at reaching a political settlement that would be decided by Syrians alone, in which they would decide their future and make their choices through an intra-Syrian dialogue under Syrian leadership and without foreign intervention. Such a settlement should ensure Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and rid from it the scourge of terrorism. In that regard, let me stress the importance of the support provided by some States to armed terrorist groups in Syria. It is essential to control the borders, in particular the borders between Turkey and Syria, where terrorists are flowing daily in large numbers.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.